

Early History of the Saint Paul Police Department

Front of Central Presbyterian Church, Cedar & Exchange Streets, Declaration Day (1903). Officers, left to right: Philip R. Gibbons, Edward Wright, Samuel Shedorski, Frank Koelndorfer, Robert C. Volkman, Sqt. J.J Daly. In 1851, Saint Paul was a sprawling frontier community, the upper terminus of the Mississippi River boat trade, a town of tradesmen and merchants serving the nearby logging industry and the needs of settlers attracted by the land boom developing to

the West. It was a violent town of violent men -- adventurers, entrepreneurs, trappers, gamblers -- with the excitement, recklessness and disorders inherent in the process of growing. Streams of men, along with their crimes and vices, were unloaded from the river packets in a continuing troublesome procession.

This was the year and the environment in which Alexander Marshall was appointed to enforce the laws of the Territory. His was perhaps a hopeless task, working single-handed against mobs of toughs attracted to the lawless freedom of the frontier. By 1854, Marshall had resigned, Saint Paul was incorporated as a city and William Miller was appointed Chief of Police of the new department. Miller with four patrolmen, waged a courageous, but ineffectual campaign against the general lawlessness and disorder. Out of sheer necessity a jail, described by a historian of the day as a "Magnificent Structure," was built in 1857 on the site of the present Landmark Center at the cost of \$6,500. This jail replaced a structure of logs and weatherboard.

The full effect of the land boom was felt in 1857. Murder, robbery and assault were commonplace. Prostitution and gambling were flagrant, The strength of the police had been increased to twelve men, assisted by a 40 man unpaid "Vigilance Committee." The officers and laymen were assaulted,

harrassed and simply overpowered by the hordes of marauding roughnecks.

Margaret Street Station Patrol Wagon (1910)

looking southeast on Margaret toward 7th Street.

The onset of the Civil War brought dramatic changes to Saint Paul. War conditions resulted in the reduction of river traffic and the shortage of saleable merchandise soon brought the business life of the city to a near standstill. The nation was in the midst of a severe economic depression which further



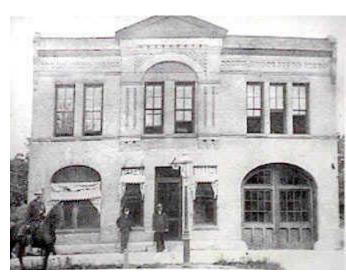
contributed to the troubles of the people. Three-quarters of the police enlisted in the Army and no funds were available to pay the rest. It was, therefore, necessary to disband the night police. A

force of two hundred volunteers was organized to take their places. They were divided into four companies, each responsible for order in one separate section of the city. The deeds of these men are today forgotten, but certainly their demonstrated courage and dedication enabled the city to survive

After Appomattox, a period of relative prosperity prevailed. The long-suffering Vigilance Committee was replaced by Chief Michael Cummings and twelve patrolmen. Serious, but not always fruitful efforts were made to reduce crime. The Mayor, Dr. Stewart, worked out an arrangement with the House of Good Shepard to accept and hopefully to rehabilitate female offenders rather than sentencing them to serve time in the common jail. There is ample evidence that their numbers were substantial. The citizens circulated a petition in 1867 that carried a note of reconciliation to what may have been an inevitable situation, yet it was with modest hope. It called on the governing body to close "saloons and disorderly houses on the Sabbath." No reported results are available.



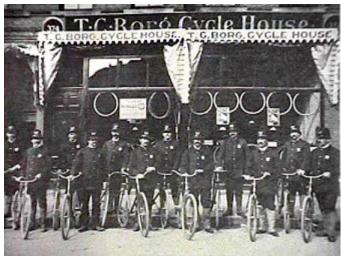
Margaret St. Sub-Station



(circa 1903) Union Park Sub-Station (circa 1903)

The growing pains of the little police department were felt in a number of ways as it struggled to bring about an orderly society. While it had many major problems, some of its smaller problems are also worthy of note. The uneven topography of the city posed substantial problems to early patrolmen struggling to propel reeling drunks uphill to the jail. The problem was of such magnitude that a civic minded merchant left his horse and delivery wagon parked overnight at 7th and Wabasha. This conveyance provided assistance to the exhausted arresting officers transporting their burdens to the safety of the jail.

In 1886, to alleviate this and other problems, four substations were built. The department moved into them on May 1, 1887. They were distributed strategically around the city; 747 Margaret St. (now an apartment building), Robert and Delos, Rondo and Western and 490 No. Proir. Today the building at 490 No. Prior is used commercially and fortunately has had only minor alterations to its exterior. Above the front entrance is the inscription "Union Park Police SubStation." The Central Station (headquarters) was later moved from Fifth and Washington to 87 W. Third St. (now Kellogg) where the Public Library is presently located. It was utilized from 1891-1911 when it was moved to 110 W. Third St.(at Washington). This was the beginning of the decade known as the "Golden Age" of the Department. The uniforms worn were of the "Metro" look, consisting of the usual blue or the gray dress felt helmets and blue coats with brass buttons. Thirty-two alarm boxes were purchased and placed on the patrolmen's beats to provide a communication system equal to any of the age. A mounted patrol of horse and bicycle riders was raised to 160 men in the growing city (population 45,000 in the year 1885).



Saint Paul Police Department's Bicycle Patrol (1897)

Among the department's acquisitions was a "first class patrol wagon." The driver Patrick Casey, was described by an observer as the "wildest driver Saint Paul has ever seen," adding charitably "although he had no accidents of consequence."

Perhaps enough has been said of the early days of the department and the struggles of a town to grow and develop. The past is helpful if it provides us with a measure of consolation in that crime is not a recent phenomenon, but it also serves as an example of the sacrifices and effort made by private citizens to actively

supress crime. The problems, the search for solutions and the sometimes humorous improvisations that were necessary should be considered in light of the fact that posterity will judge us and find some of our solutions equally funny. The problems of the nineteenth century have their parallels in the twentieth. Today's technology as manifested in records, transportation, communications, the laboratory and other aids to the police officers are only extensions of Mr. Casey's "first class patrol wagon," the mounted patrols and the alarm boxes.

Did You Know??

Around the turn-of-the-century, police officers on the beat communicated with each other by use of signals with their nightsticks.

If a sergeant had gone over a patrolman's beat and was unable to find him, he would then go to its center and each extremity and tap his nightstick twice. This was known as a "call rap." The patrolman would answer in like manner. If the visiting officer required the presence of the patrolman, he would give a single rap. In lieu of the nightstick, the whistle would be used.

If a patrolman on his beat required the presence of another officer on an adjoining beat, he would, in ordinary cases, give a single rap or whistle, which would be answered in like manner. Then the patrolman making the call would again give a single rap or whistle in answer. I case of fire, riot or other emergency, he would give three taps or whistles in quick succession and all officers hearing it would answer by a single rap or whistle and immediately come to the assistance of the officer making the call. If an officer was in pursuit of a person at night, he was, from time to time, to give a single rap or whistle to inform other officers of his route.

In 1930, with the coming of police one-way radio, Saint Paul Police installed receivers in sixteen squad cars. Police calls were then, for a short time, broadcast over KSTP Radio.

When the police dispatcher received a complaint, he was able to interupt the general programming of KSTP, sound a gong and give the call to the squad three times. After the police call was completed, the regular programming was resumed. Of course, the dispatcher had no way of knowing if the squad in fact received the call.

The use of KSTP Radio and the gong were discontinued shortly before 1939 when the Saint Paul Police went to two-way radios.